

Defining *perfin* is a big step in foreign catalog effort

One of the lessons I learned from the 1997 foreign perfins census is that we don't always agree when it comes to defining the term *perfin*.

I know I'm getting into deep water when I start trying to define anything philatelic, so let me emphasize that I am not trying to define what anybody collects. We all have the right to collect anything we want.

But when it comes to cataloging perfins, it is important to have some guidelines about what is and what is not a *perfin*.

John Randall, the U. S. catalog editor, and his predecessors crossed the definition bridge a long time ago. Basically, they have followed these criteria:

A perfin is a perforated design, symbol, insignia, letter, or group of letters in a postage stamp placed there by an individual, organization, or government agency for the purpose of controlling the stamp's postal use.

I propose that we adopt these same criteria for foreign perfins.

What that definition does is remove from consideration—for catalog purposes—perforations on fiscals, labels, and other non-postal “stamps.” It also eliminates—for catalog purposes—the PAID, Kodak control number, and other miscellaneous perforations that only wound up on a stamp because one got in the way.

What it does not eliminate are the SPECIMEN, star punches, and other perforations which were designed to control a stamp's use.

Postal stationery is not expressly covered in the definition because, with rare exception, the perfins used on postal stationery are also used on postage stamps.

Some of the members with whom I have shared this definition have warned me that there are surely going to be exceptions to any definition. I understand that and I've asked two distinguished senior members of the Perfins Club, former president Richard McWhinney and former foreign catalog editor Bob Schwerdt, to serve as advisors to help

me make the appropriate decision when those questions arise.

I suspect that a number of the “perfins” reported in the most recent census fall outside this definition. While most members were careful not to report perfins on fiscal or revenue issues in the census, many did include PAID or control number punches as part of the count.

So what about the revenues and other perforated items? I suggest they be identified for what they are and catalogued separately.

Our first challenge should be to catalog as completely as possible those perfins that appear on postage stamps and were put there to control their use.

At the same time, we can begin cataloging the foreign (and U. S.) perfins that were used to cancel or control the use of fiscal stamps--and the perforations that were used for other purposes if there is sufficient interest.

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